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ABSTRACT

This study uses interviews with the principals of five elementary schools in Seattle (Washington) to identify effective strategies and practices associated with schools that demonstrated high gains in reading and mathematics achievement. The results of each interview are presented in the form of a case study illustrating the principal's behavior. Common to each school is a principal who "backs a winner" by empowering a teacher who influenced other teachers through special training/expertise, enthusiasm, and/or willingness to take on extra responsibility. Principals also used the following norm-setting behaviors identified by Keedy (1982) to influence teachers: (1) provision of resources, especially personnel; (2) authority of position; (3) replacement/transfer of teachers; (4) teacher peer pressure; (5) recruitment/selection of teachers; (6) modeling; and (7) teacher decision making/input. (FMW)

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A LOOK AT SOME HIGH GAIN SCHOOLS

REPORT NO. 89-3
MARCH, 1989

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A LOOK AT SOME HIGH GAIN SCHOOLS

In fall 1988, a Testing and Evaluation Office staff person visited five elementary schools identified on the basis of 1987-88 Academic Effectiveness Index (AEI) scores as "high gainers" in reading or math for either or both primary and intermediate students. The purpose of these visits was twofold: (1) to see what school personnel identify as strategies and practices that produce the high gains and (2) to make this information available to other school faculties who might wish to adopt those tried and true" strategies.

The visits consisted primarily of interviews with the school principal. In most cases, interviews were followed up with telephone conversations; in some cases, the interview was preceded or followed by classroom visits; and in one case, another staff person was interviewed along with the principal.

Rather than do as originally planned, generate and disseminate a list of practices mentioned by principals at high-gain schools, we decided that it would be more informative and probably more interesting to provide a "vignette", which summarizes the information obtained from each visit. The vignettes are appended.

What is written below are the interviewer's more subjective observations and impressions, formed in the process of trying to identify similarities and differences in the practices of the principals interviewed.

One particular practice is mentioned first because, after some reflection, it became apparent that it was common to all five principals. It is a practice the writer started to call "backing a winner", where the winner was a teacher who influenced other teachers by means of special training/expertise, enthusiasm, and/or willingness to take on extra responsibility. However, the verb "back" is too passive; "empowering a winner" is more descriptive of the practice. In each case, the principal empowered a particular teacher--a winner--to strengthen the academic program.

To illustrate, School D's "winner" was a Chapter I teacher who exerted a strong influence over the total school reading program, despite being among the least senior of the school's faculty. The principal at School D encouraged, and joined, her participation in a special inservice training workshop and empowered her to act as a reading consultant to the entire faculty; it did, of course, no harm that this particular teacher was generous with her time, diplomatic, and enthusiastic in addition to being a highly skilled reading teacher.

In one other of the five schools, the "winner" was also a Chapter I teacher; in another two, it was a gifted program teacher; and in one school it was a strong teacher funded by special monies to direct a special needs program which served bilingual as well as nonbilingual "special needs" students.

In trying to make sense of and bring some order to a description of other observations and impressions gathered during the interviews, it was helpful to adopt Keedy's categorization of behaviors that principals use to set school norms (Keedy, 1982; Achilles and Keedy, 1983-84).1 There were compelling reasons for this adoption: (1) earlier work by the Testing and Evaluation Office (Ramey, 1987) indicates that a schools' standards or norms for student (and staff) behavior/performance are strongly related to its academic achievement growth; (2) a measure of principal leadership, which was used in that work, was found to be highly predictive of the presence and operation of such norms; and (3) Keedy's categorization provides a framework for describing how the principal establishes and maintains school norms.

The two principal norm setting behaviors most frequently noted during the interviews were **provision of resources** and **use of authority of position**.

The principal at School A exemplifies **provision of resources**, especially where people are resources. She uses student interns to implement team teaching, rather than to relieve the regular teacher; maintains a strong parent tutoring program; and has students from a local private high school come on a regular basis to act as tutors and role models.

The principal at school D exemplifies use of **authority of position**. He maintains an observable distance from the teaching staff, although he is extremely outgoing with and approachable by students. He visits each classroom daily, admits to being "direct" rather than democratic, and described several instances where he intervened between teachers to settle bounds of responsibility issues; i.e., he used decision by "fiat". Part and parcel of this principal's mode of operation was his use of another category of norm setting behavior, **replacement/transfer of teachers**. Early in his tenure at the present school he took action to remove a teacher whose inappropriate behavior had gone unchecked by the previous principal.

Other categories of norm setting behavior noted in this series of observations/interviews were: **teacher peer pressure**, **recruitment/selection of teachers**, **modeling**, and **teacher decision making/input**.

Use of **teacher peer pressure** was evident in an anecdote told by the principal at School C. A teacher new to the building dressed in an informal style at variance with the building's unwritten professional dress code. The same teacher also used self-made instructional materials instead of the text and supplementary materials agreed on by the rest of the staff.

Since the principal could see that the resistant teacher was also a poor teacher, he permitted other staff to put pressure for conformity on her. The resistant teacher eventually transferred out of the building.

This same principal described use of another norm setting behavior, **recruitment/selection of teachers**. Although the principal cannot request that specific teachers be transferred into his school, he can and does ease access for teachers who show an interest in such transfer. In this, the principal has used the drawing power of the school's long-term reputation for high academic standards for students and clearly defined professional standards for staff. (Implicit seems to be the belief that the kinds of teachers who would be attracted by these qualities of the school are most likely the kind of teachers the school wants.)

The principal at School A provides a good example of **modeling**. As part of a total school recognition of student achievement, this principal has "student achievers" singled out of homeroom or the library to be sent to her office for special recognition--"a big fuss", which includes cookies, reading to the principal, and the award of a sticker that says "you are great...". This is a highly visible event which has a twofold purpose: to reinforce student achievement and to model reinforcement of that achievement.

The last principal norm setting behavior noted in the series of five interviews is **teacher decision making/input**. This behavior was illustrated by the principal at School E. In response to the preinterview request for a list of the school's instructional strategies and practices, the principal had obviously consulted with most

if not all teachers in the building, most of whom had provided a written response. The principal provided some background for and elaboration of these responses during the interview, but the responses themselves were the basic information provided the interviewer.

The particular norm setting behaviors noted above aren't the only ones in Keedy's schema and it is probable that the principals use others which were simply not observed nor remarked on during the visit. Other norm setting behaviors described by Keedy are: human relations, appeal/persuasion, mediator/manipulator, and teacher as go-between.

1 Keedy's definition of a school norm as a standard or expectation of performance binding on teachers to guide, control, and regulate proper and acceptable behavior is consistent with our measure of schoolwide standards/norms. (See Ramey, 1987)

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SCHOOL A

High AEI in primary reading. Special programs: Ch. I (LAP), two self-contained SPED (moderately retarded). Principal, is in 3rd year at A. Demogs (for students on whom AEI calculated: 80.0% White (District: 49.7%), 67.8% living with both parents (District: 59.6%), 34.4% on free or reduced price lunch (District: 33.9%)

Chapter I teacher played significant role in last year's high primary reading scores: early assessment and diagnosis (all kids, not just eligible), assessment for placement of all new students as they come in throughout the year. Did the non-Chapter I on her own time, before and after school (compliance issue); links well with regular teachers.

Uses University student interns to permit team teaching. (Not just to have intern take the class with regular teacher doing something else.) Also uses School A students for cross-age tutoring.

Incentive program: Total school recognition of achievement, compliment parents, reward of reading to principal. (Principal "makes a big fuss" when achievers sent in from library or homeroom after finishing skill level; reward: sticker "You are great...", cookies bought for this purpose by PTSA--after noting that principal was supplying them.)

After Testing & Evaluation visit last year, made strong commitment to reading. Formally: whole staff meetings, meetings with primary only, meeting with just two teachers; informally came about after first formal meeting, by teachers just talking together about reading instruction.

Relied heavily on Bob V's item analysis. Basis for change. Followed, in analysis, grade to grade pattern, worked at cross-grade remedies.

Focus on math this year--watch out: don't let reading (or vice versa, when reading is focus) fall down.

Not a total school reading program--"entrenched" opposition to change. However, do have reading at same period (first) schoolwide; which does allow for some room to room movement.

Principal visibility: visits classrooms unannounced, has form for noting what's going on; uses for keeping tabs, follow-up discussions with teachers; dated so can refer back, look for progress, or lack of it.

Uses staff meetings for inservice--draws on people from own building. (I noted on agenda for today's staff meeting, and saw visual aids material for the topics of decreasing disproportionality, increasing academic effectiveness.)

Tutoring from parents, good numbers and steady, reliable.

Private high school students (26 juniors) come on bus three days a week to tutor; heroes ("tall boys") to students; effective reinforcing agents.)

SCHOOL B

High AEI in primary reading. Special programs: Horizon (one class), Chapter I, also houses Bilingual Orientation Center (BOC).* Principal is in first year at B. (Information below gotten mostly by current principal from staff who were there last year.) Demogs (for students on whom AEI calculated: 46.7% White (District: 49.7%), 58.3% living with both parents (District: 59.1%), 35% on free or reduced price lunch (District: 33.9%).

A lot attributed to the way they used "special needs" money: K, 1 students considered special need got reading and math in 12:1 classroom. Also reduced class size by having science/computer and special needs pullout, so that a smaller number of students remained for reading instruction. This (science/computer) pullout done in half hour blocks; all students got both pullout and reading during some part of the day. Now don't have FTE for science/computer pullout--plan on using parent volunteers (current principal did something along these lines at former school).

Strong parent tutoring program. Principal plans to build on this--trying to get HOSTs reading in building and use parent volunteers. (HOSTs quite structured, so that tutors have clear picture of what to do.)

Used librarian as part of reading emphasis; sent reading material home with student, with communication to parent (?) on how to help student.

Single most impacting teacher, C.M., taught Horizon last year, now doing Chapter I. Puts in extra time, puts same amount of creativity, ingenuity into Ch I planning/instruction.

* BOC administratively (although principal responsible for it too) and physically separate, but on Fridays two teachers do a small exchange of BOC and School B students. Also, as part of action plan (following a teacher's suggestion) bring in "problem" School B students to role play certain behaviors (and their consequences). Related in plan to reducing disproportionality in discipline. The behavior problem students are usually Black males.

SCHOOL C

High AEI in intermediate reading. Special programs: Special Education, Bilingual, Special Needs position (1 FTE); no Horizon, no Chapter I. Met with principal and administrative intern. Principal in 4th year at C. Demogs (for students on whom AEI calculated): 65.9% White (District: 49.7%), 80.6% living with both parents (District: 59.6%), 15.9% on free or reduced price lunch (District: 33.9%).

Reading instruction has been a budget and instructional priority. All out push to get students at appropriate reading level.

Special Needs and ESL teachers run Learning Center (reading and language arts). Bilingual students get approximately 1 hr reading and 1 hr language arts per day. Two highly skilled teachers run the Learning Center; these teachers also advise regular teachers--this spills over into "nonremedial" reading instruction. During reading time, these teachers take low ability readers in Learning Center. School's reading time is based on Learning Center time, one in a.m., one in p.m. (50-60 min.)

Not a total school reading program, but exchange within grades, in order to group kids by reading ability. Above level fourth grade students go 5th grade (only 2 to 5 of these kids.) Grouping within grades. Originally, principal's first choice was total school reading program. Now thinks there are some advantages to within grade grouping: monitoring student progress, teacher communication.

Pride of school (has been there traditionally, but principal and staff continue to build on this quality. Teachers are expected to look, act, and dress professionally, have businesslike demeanor. Peer and parent pressure to do so. Large number (250) of parents involved in school activities. Parent volunteers used in library--conveys message, "books are important." Members of community, not just parents, come to PTSA meetings, contribute to paper drive, come to social events.

Leadership: Principal goes in to observe class and has communicated that he will do so and that he expects to see all students placed in same reading series (Ginn). Prior to principal's arrival, teachers had own reading materials. Principal and reading specialist--note use of specialist--attended Ginn workshop. Reading specialist then gave staff inservice. Staff evaluation based on teaching <u>reading</u> and appropriate placement of students for reading; principal's message to staff.

1. will be <u>in</u> classroom
2. expects all students to be placed appropriately in reading series
3. expects to see: direct instruction; guided practice; frequent monitoring; reteaching, if needed.

SCHOOL D

High AEI in primary and intermediate reading; pretty low previous year. Special programs: Special Education resource room and self contained class. Principal now in 4th year. Demogs (for students on whom AEI calculated): 48.3% White (District: 49.7%), 61.7% living with both parents (District: 59.6%), 56.6% on free or reduced price lunch (District: 33.9%)

Principal attributes high AEI primarily to last year's Ch. I teacher, D.M., who was surplused. Expressed dismay that an aide was offered for this year and that this fall, school has only a half-time cert. Previous Ch I teacher exerted influence over total school reading program; shared ideas and enthusiasm.

Principal and Chapter I teacher participated in **Teaching Study Skills** workshop. Chapter I teacher brought back to staff and helped implement. Fifth grade class especially used. (Grade 5 reading AEI (2.44) is highest of all grades.) Very specific "how to's". Chapter I teacher's room highly organized, structured.

Not an all school reading program, but emphasis on reading. Awareness assembly once a quarter--this reinforces reading. This for past two years.

Minorities from all over the world. Note 'disproportionality' graph: great for reading, not so great for math; parallels AEI
pattern.

Leadership: Principal visits each classroom every day. Self-described as believing in order, structure, discipline. (As principal of an open-space school--earlier assignment--still imposed structure). My observation of interaction with students and staff: some distance with latter; obviously familiar to and approachable by students. Admitted to being "direct" rather than democratic. Intervenes between teachers, e.g. in a 'squabble' between Ch I and regular teacher on boundaries of responsibility, told them each who "had what". Related two other instances of intervention with staff which showed authoritative leadership style.

SCHOOL E

High AEI in primary math (primarily due to large Horizon student gains). Special programs: 5 self-contained SPED, SPED resource room (1 FTE), Chapter 1 reading specialist. Principal, is in third year at E. Demogs (for students on whom AEI calculated): 49% White (District: 49.7%), 54.8% living with both parents (District: 59.6%), 41.3% on free or reduced price lunch (District: 33.9%).

Preceded list of activities, strategies, techniques with comment that they're doing nothing new, but that they made math a focus and concentrated time and effort on the it last year.

Used a lot of manipulatives especially in Kindergarten (used Math their Way).

"Fact Mastery" in grades 1 - 3. Send home flash cards, have students make own flash cards, games using facts, "Math a Minute" (see Wayne P.) Lots of drill (special materials: audio tapes, sheets) using timers, charting individual progress (some students chart their own progress and even express as fractions; e.g. number correct/total, rewards (edible manipulatives; e.g., peanuts)

Grades 1,2 individualize, pace math modules to student, some large groups for concept such as 'money'

Use calculators (if mastery of facts demonstrated, e.g. adding two single digits in grade 1)

Several teachers do one story problem a day (recognize deficiencies in this skill elsewhere), use examples drawn from everyday at school; e.g.,.....

"Math quickie" practice at beginning of math session; 5 minutes on 4 (one each for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) problems. (Third grade, Horizon)

Higher grades students make each other's assignments. Another student modifies it; e.g., set of 10 two digit addition problems made up by one student, another modifies it by adding 10 to one (or both of the addends). (Horizon)

Computers. Every two classrooms share a computer.

When starting (and continuing) a module (unit) where its appropriate, have rules, steps emphasized, posted, reviewed. Repetition, visibility.

No cross grade math teaching.

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